

Constituent Services

I refer to constituent service as "customer service" and believe it to be of the highest priority. From helping veterans obtain the medical care they have earned, to ensuring that seniors receive their Social Security benefits, to assisting farmers struck by natural disasters, my office helped literally thousands of constituents last year. My staff and I work for Kansans, and we don't forget it for a minute.

Constituent Service Highlights

In 2007, my office assisted with 2,068 constituent services cases. We fought hard to cut through red tape and ensure that Kansans received fair treatment from the federal government.

Of the 2,068 cases, 794 involved constituents impacted by last summer's severe backlog of passport applications. Because the passport crisis arose outside of the usual constituent services operations of my office, I have not included those cases in the percentage breakdowns below. A more detailed description of the passport problem may be found at the end of this document.

Additionally, my office sent 60,571 letters in response to constituent concerns. Each letter provided detailed, practical information on issues of importance to the Kansas Second District.

Table of Contents

Military / Veterans: 356 cases, 28%	1
Grants: 171 cases, 14%	2
Social Security: 154 cases, 12%	2
Local Issues / Miscellaneous: 153 cases, 12%.....	3
Immigration: 96 cases, 8%.....	3
Health Care: 83 cases, 7%	4
Disaster Relief / Agriculture: 107 cases, 8%	4
Federal Employment: 40 cases, 3%	5
Financial: 31 cases, 2%	5
Housing: 29 cases, 2%	6
Postal Issues: 28 cases, 2%	6
Student Loans: 26 cases, 2%.....	6
Passports: 794 cases.....	7
Constituent Mail: 60,571 letters.....	7

Military / Veterans: 356 cases, 28%

- *Veterans Health and Benefits*
- *Active Duty and Reservist Concerns*
- *Obtaining Medals*
- *FBI Inquiries*

Example: A Carbondale woman learned early last year that the Burlingame Historical Society was seeking the military records of local veterans. She knew that her late father-in-law had served in the Navy in World War II, so she contacted my office for help in tracking down his service records.

My office often helps relatives learn more about their loved ones' military history, and sometimes, as we dig through decades-old records, we uncover long-buried stories.

The woman's father-in-law had enlisted in the Navy in December of 1939, and he was assigned to the USS Tennessee, a 32,300-ton battleship stationed in Pearl Harbor. Two years later, on December 7, 1941, he found himself in the midst of a defining moment in U.S. history -- the "date which will live in infamy," when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and triggered America's involvement in World War II. He served America honorably throughout World War II. On November 1, 1945, he received an honorable discharge, and he passed away many years later in 1998.

While reviewing this history, we also discovered that he was eligible for seven medals that he had never been formally awarded. We contacted the National Personnel Records Center, where staffers retrieved his hard-earned medals. In a moving and long-overdue ceremony in July, I formally presented the medals to two of the soldier's surviving relatives.



In July, I presented a Pearl Harbor veteran's survivors with seven medals that he had never been awarded in life.

Grants: 171 cases, 14%

- *Grantwriting Assistance*
- *Research on Federal Grant Opportunities*
- *Announcements of Grant Awards*

Example: In the summer of 2006 in Galena, Kansas, a part of a downtown business called the Green Parrot suddenly collapsed into a sinkhole. It was a dramatic reminder of the dangers posed by subsidence from abandoned mining operations.

To help prevent future disasters, my office worked with community leaders to identify available grant money from the Economic Development Administration. My staff attended numerous meetings to shepherd the grant proposal through the application process, and eventually, the Economic Development Administration awarded \$250,000 for an engineering study to identify abandoned mine voids.



The Green Parrot in Galena, Kansas, suffered severe damage following a sinkhole collapse. Photo by Kansas Department of Health and Environment.

Social Security: 154 cases, 12%

- *Disability Adjudication*
- *Lost and Delayed Retirement Applications*
- *Lost and Delayed Payments*
- *Overpayment Matters*

Example: A gentleman contacted my office early last year because his application for Social Security disability benefits had gone unanswered for several months. He was suffering from stage IV cancer, and because his illness had left him unable to work, he desperately needed the financial assistance that disability benefits provide.

My office contacted the Social Security Administration in Topeka to request a status update. We were told that no medical decision had been made on his case, but his application was pending.

My staff explained the gentleman's financial situation and urged an expedited ruling on his case. A few days later we received a letter from Social Security saying that the constituent would begin receiving benefits right away. In addition to his regular benefits, he also received a payment of nearly \$5,000 in retroactive benefits, beginning from the date of his application.

Local Issues / Miscellaneous: 153 cases, 12%

- *Connecting Constituents with Local Agencies*
- *Answering Questions Regarding State / Local Government*
- *Miscellaneous*

Example: We have all heard that the wheels of government turn slowly, but every once in a while, when it really matters, those wheels can turn rapidly in response to individual need.

A Second District constituent was diagnosed with pancreatic and lung cancers. In a very short span of time, he lost his job and, with it, his employer-provided health insurance. He was left unemployable and without access to health care. He had applied for Medicaid, but his application was tied up in red tape.

By the time this gentleman called my office, he was running out of options. He would likely have to cancel a fast-approaching chemotherapy appointment, and without chemotherapy, his odds of survival would be greatly diminished.

Upon learning about the problem, my office contacted representatives from the state government, which administers Medicaid in Kansas. We worked with the state agency to fast-track his application, and he was able to keep his scheduled medical appointments.

Immigration: 96 cases, 8%

- *Immigrant / Non-Immigrant Visas*
- *Naturalization*
- *Permanent Residency*

Example: This year, my office heard from a mother-to-be who was dealing with a complicated, potentially dangerous pregnancy. Her physicians had told her that, due to potential complications, her best option was a Cesarean birth.

In light of both the dangers and joys of her pregnancy, she wanted the support of her whole family during the weeks surrounding her child's birth. Unfortunately, her mother lived in Latvia, and her application for a non-immigrant visa had been unsuccessful.

The family contacted our office, and we petitioned to the United States Embassy in Latvia for reconsideration. Our petition was granted. The grandmother traveled to America for her grandchild's birth, and today my constituent services office is adorned by a lovely photo of mother, child and grandmother.

Health Care: 83 cases, 7%

- *Medicare Problems*
- *Health-Related Concerns*

Example: Early last year, a Topeka woman discovered that she had been enrolled in a Medicare Part D supplement without her knowledge. For a number of months, the program's premiums were withheld from her Social Security check, and all of her attempts to fix the problem met with failure and frustration.

In early July, she contacted my Topeka office to see if we could help find a solution. We asked Medicare to look into the matter, and they discovered that she was in fact enrolled in a program that she had not chosen. The problem was immediately fixed, and she received a prompt refund from Medicare for her premiums.

Disaster Relief / Agriculture: 107 cases, 8%

- *Individual Disaster Relief Applications*
- *Community and Agency Disaster Relief Applications*
- *Advocating for Farmers to the Department of Agriculture*

Example: Between the floods, tornadoes, and ice storms that struck Kansas last year, every single county in the Second Congressional District was declared a federal disaster area. My office received numerous calls from constituents who had questions about the disaster relief process, and members of my staff attended numerous Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) briefings so that we could effectively advocate on behalf of Kansans.

One of our biggest concerns was ensuring that every Second District resident who was eligible for FEMA relief learned about the disaster declaration. After all, disaster relief funds do Kansans no good if they don't know they're eligible!

After the May floods, my staff walked door-to-door along flooded riverbanks to inform families about the disaster relief process. I also made wide-scale announcements over local radio.

The experiences of the last year have left my office with broad experience in navigating the federal disaster relief process. We hope that the weather treats Kansas more kindly next year and that we will have no need to call upon our expertise – but if disaster strikes, we'll be ready to help.

Federal Employment: 40 cases, 3%

- *Assistance to Federal Employees with Work-Related Concerns*
- *Help to Retired Civil Servants*

Example: The Kansas Second Congressional District is home to tens of thousands of federal employees, including three military bases and one of the largest Coast Guard facilities in the country. When employees of these agencies encounter problems on the job or following their retirement, they often contact my office for help.

Among the cases we dealt with in 2007 were public employees who had noticed inefficiencies in federal operations and retired civil servants who discovered unexplained changes in their retirement benefits. Often, our office provided the bridge that connected these individuals to solutions.

Not only can our office sometimes solve the problems of federal employees – we provide civil servants with a voice in the legislative process. These employees provide my office with a ground-level perspective on federal operations that is often overlooked in Congressional committee hearings.

Financial: 31 cases, 2%

- *Help with Tax-Related Problems*
- *Information on Consumer Rights*

Example: In April, I hosted a *Congress on Your Corner* event at a Topeka coffee shop. Among the attendees was a gentleman who had noticed something odd in his Social Security statement. As a self-employed worker in 1977, he had properly filed his taxes and paid money into Social Security, but his benefits statement reported that he'd earned zero income that year.

My staff contacted the Internal Revenue Service and asked that they review the gentleman's records. They found that they had indeed made an error in reporting his income to the Social Security Administration. As a result of the omission of his 1977 income, his benefits had been miscalculated for years. He was eligible for a lump-sum payment of the accumulated benefits plus interest.

When the Social Security Administration refigured the constituent's payments, he received a check for over \$300.

Housing: 29 cases, 2%

- *Advocating for Constituents Facing Housing Problems*
- *Connecting Constituents to Community Resources*

Example: Many Second District residents were impacted by this year's crisis in the housing market. Our office heard from numerous constituents who faced severe financial problems and were at risk of losing their homes.

While we are regrettably unable to intervene directly in a consumer's dealings with a mortgage company, we can provide important support through financial counseling. Toward that end, we often connect constituents with a federally funded credit counseling service.

Many of the Kansans who contacted our office discovered that, by adopting better financial practices and following the advice of a licensed credit counselor, they could keep their homes and begin restoring their credit.

Postal Issues: 28 cases, 2%

- *Postal Service Delivery Issues*

Example: My office heard last year from a gentleman who was having problems setting up a post office box. As with many problems we hear about, the root cause was a simple breakdown in communication. Neither party was at fault; the problem was just a misunderstanding. We worked with the post office, and the constituent was able to set up his PO box.

My office's relationship with the U.S. Postal Service is important in many cases beyond those that directly deal with postal delivery. For example, during the passport crisis last summer, hundreds of Kansans contacted my office because their passports had been delayed after they were shipped in the mail. My staff worked closely with the post office to let constituents know exactly where their passports were and how long they might have to wait for delivery. On several occasions, members of my staff even picked up passports at the post office after hours and hand-delivered the documents to travelers the night before their early morning flights.

Student Loans: 26 cases, 2%

- *Help with Repayment Problems*

Example: Many of the student loan problems my office addressed this year involved situations where a Kansan could not repay loans because of sudden health expenses or unexpected life changes. Quite often, we can work with the Department of Education to help constituents receive a temporary forbearance or reduced loan payments.

Passports: 794 cases

Background: In addition to my office's normal casework operations, we responded last year to a passport crisis that affected millions of U.S. travelers.

In January of 2007, the U.S. State Department began requiring American citizens to present passports for air travel to several regions where, previously, no passport was required, including Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Bermuda. As a consequence, the number of new passport applications climbed dramatically, creating a major backlog and increasing the average processing time from 10 weeks to nearly 18 weeks.

Our office worked with the State Department on behalf of nearly 800 constituents to ensure that their applications were completed in a timely manner. The vast majority of these constituents were indeed able to make their trips as planned.

Example: In the early months of 2007, the youth group at Topeka's Grace Episcopal Cathedral in Topeka began planning a pilgrimage to London and Canterbury. They raised funds, studied their history, and prepared for an exciting and educational trip – and they applied for passports well in advance of their trip. What they didn't count on, however, was the "Passport Crisis of '07."

The church contacted my office last summer after they heard about the passport crisis on the news. They provided us with a list of the travelers who still had not received their passports, and my staff went to work tracking down each and every one of their applications. Several were in the Charleston passport office. A few more were in Houston. One was as far away as New Hampshire.

We worked closely with the State Department to expedite their applications, and the last passport arrived in Topeka just days before the group's scheduled departure. All were able to make the journey.

Constituent Mail: 60,571 letters

Kansans from the Second Congressional District wrote to my office about a wide variety of issues last year, and I strived to their questions as quickly and thoroughly as possible.

The three concerns I heard about most frequently were the State Children's Health Insurance Program (2,804 letters), immigration and border security (1,999 letters), and the war in Iraq (1,777 letters). The thousands of letters I received on these issues provided invaluable guidance in my debates and votes in Congress.